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HOW THE LABOR UNION IN EPHEBUS PROVOKED AN ANGRY MOB

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 80
ACTS 19:20-29

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ACTS 19:20-29 "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre."

As a result of Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus, we now have a progress report. The word "mightily" means according to the norm or standard of power. The teaching of the Word of God always brings power. Paul taught the Word of God in Ephesus in the power of the Spirit. "Grew and prevailed" are both in the perfect tense and this fact signifies that there was constant progress. This ministry in Ephesus turned out to be the greatest of his whole life. It was without doubt his most successful teaching and preaching of his whole career, and it was done in a demon center. Ephesus was one of the heathen centers of the world. The center of Ephesus was the Temple of Artemas or Diana. Close around the Temple were the shops of the silversmiths, and they had a great trade going for them in the sale of statues of Diana. But in our study today we see that the sale of these statues had fallen off because of the preaching of Paul.

ACTS 19:21 "After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome." Before we get into the mob that occurred in Ephesus, Paul's travel plans are announced. Paul realized that the Roman Province of Asia had been saturated with the gospel and the people had grown into stabilized Christians. Paul knew he had good trained leadership in Ephesus who could carry his work on in his absence. So verse 21 is a parenthesis to announce Paul's future plans. Therefore at the end of three years in Ephesus, when all of Asia heard the gospel, Paul decided to go again to Macedonia and Achaia. It is quite clear to me that it was not God's will for Paul to go back to Jerusalem, as we will later see. God had chosen Paul as an instrument to the Gentiles, but Paul had a passion for the Jerusalem Jews and we will see later on that when he returned to Jerusalem, he almost lost his life. It took a miracle from God to save him, which in due time we will study.

Up to this time Paul's ministry had all been east of the Adriatic Sea and this means that he had been in lands of Hellenistic culture. Later on Paul will move into the lands west of the Adriatic Sea and those lands were under Latin culture. But Paul couldn't get the Jerusalem Jews out of his mind and he was determined to go back there to try to straighten out their theology. God warned him again and again not to go, but Paul was determined. Because of this error Paul will have several years of discipline from God and the last part of the Book of the Acts will tell this story. Even with this failure, Paul remains as possibly the greatest man of Grace Jesus ever captured.

ACTS 19:22 "So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season." Having heard of the needs in Athens and Corinth, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to minister to them. Timothy we know quite well. He was a half-Jew and a half-Gentile from Lystra, and was probably converted when Paul went there on his first missionary journey. On the second time Paul visited Lystra, Timothy joined Paul's team. He was an evangelist according to 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 4:5. Then later on Timothy will minister as Pastor of the church in Ephesus. Paul left Timothy behind at Philippi to nurture the young church, but later he rejoined Paul at Athens. Paul sent him back to Macedonia, then later he joined Paul in Ephesus. Now Paul sent him again to Macedonia and Achaia to straighten out the churches in Corinth and Titus replaced him there. Erastus was also sent along and he was one of the believers of Corinth. Erastus reported to Paul the trouble going on in the church in Corinth and his report resulted in the writing of 1st and 2nd Corinthians. In Romans 16:23 Erastus is described as one of the city councilmen of Corinth.

Paul could have left Ephesus at this point, but he had to stay around because some opposition developed. A real storm was brewing. If Paul had left Ephesus the trouble would not have been as intense. However this opposition gave an occasion for the law and order of the Roman government to reach in and save the day for the Ephesian church. We will see certain principles rise out of this incident in Ephesus which will focus our attention on the importance and power of Bible doctrine.

ACTS 19:23 "And the same time there arose no small stir about that way." This is the beginning of the Satanic counterattack. This theme of opposition will run through the remainder of the chapter. This is the warning of the gathering storm. "No small stir" is an idiom which means a great catastrophe. "That way" refers to salvation by grace which Paul had so effectively preached in Ephesus. The trouble all began in the meeting of the silversmith union. This was Local No. 1 at Ephesus headed up by Union President Demetrius. They had a fantastic business in the figurine business, figurines of the Goddess Diana. Right in the middle of the Temple stood the very great and beautiful statue of Diana. Every tourist who visited Ephesus wanted a little figurine or copy of this statue. These silversmiths had a big thing going for them in the sale of these statues, and the business was especially good in the month of May which was dedicated to the worship of Diana. Diana is the Roman equivalent of the Goddess Artemis. She was the Goddess of Sex and the whole month of May was given to their lustful worship. It was something like a prolonged Mardi Gras. The Temple of Diana was 425 feet long and 220 feet wide, and in the interior there was a room with 93,000 square feet in it. It had 127 columns to support the Temple and these columns had been given by kings of the nations, and each was ornate and studded with precious jewels. Inside the Temple was the largest bank of the world and great wealth was deposited there. In the Ancient World banks were located in heathen temples and it was only after Christianity came that this was changed. Right in the center of this Temple was the massive and beautiful statue of Diana and people came from all over the world to visit the temple and see the statue. Most all the tourists wanted a little silver figurine of Diana so they could take it home and show their friends a remembrance of their visit to Ephesus. It was also a reminder of the wild good times they had during the licentious month of May in Ephesus. Now Paul had not denounced these things in his preaching, he had simply preached Bible doctrine and the truth of the Bible struck a death blow to all these heathenish things. A result of Paul's preaching had been a decline in sales of the silver statues.

ACTS 19:24 "For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen" These union craftsmen had been making a fantastic fortune on the sale of these statues.

ACTS 19:25 "Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs ye know that by this craft we have our wealth." Therefore Union leader Demetrius called a union meeting of Local No. 1. Demetrius wanted to impress the union members of the seriousness of the crisis they faced. For months sales had been declining in Ephesus and Demetrius knew it was time for the union officials to take some action.

ACTS 19:26 "Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands" This is a description of the extent of the crisis. It had touched the whole Province of Asia. In their meeting they referred to "This Paul". So by this time Paul was a very well-known figure in Ephesus. And indeed this is quite a compliment to the effectiveness of the ministry of Paul in the Province of Asia. The word "Persuaded" means to teach people by a clear and logical explanation. This was always Paul's method. He preached the truth and was willing for all the facts to be revealed. All of these people had heard Paul preach, and though they didn't personally accept the things Paul said, it disturbed them deeply for they realized his preaching was cutting into their business profit. So we read that as a result Paul "Turned away much people" from buying the silver statues.

Paul had presented the truth that no God can be made with human hands, and Paul taught that men should not worship anything that has been made by man's hands. Paul didn't come right out and tell them not to buy the statues of Diana. He gave them Bible doctrine and then he let them make up their own minds. When the people in Ephesus heard Paul preach and were converted, they immediately revolted against sexual impurity. They stopped worshipping idols. They stopped going to the temple for immoral activity. Evidently Demetrius had gone to hear Paul preach and had heard Paul preach against idols. You see, Paul had presented God as a spiritual being and Paul's preaching just cut straight across idolatry. Paul preached great spiritual truth and this clashed with idol worship. The decisions made by these Ephesian Christians were based on Bible truth. Demetrius and these craftsmen had sense enough to know that they had lost them as customers forever. The change that had taken place in Ephesus was a genuine change.

ACTS 19:27 "So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth." So the silver-smith union was in grave danger and the whole system of idolatrous religion which centered in the worship of Diana was in danger. The Temple of Diana was cleaned and run by a Priesthood of eunuchs. They had a number of virgins to assist in the services, but the main body of performers were several thousands of dancing girls who practiced prostitution there in the heathen temple. In the month of May this wild licentious activity reached its peak. When these who participated in this heathen kind of immorality left the temple they wanted a little figurine or statue to take with them. But because of Paul's preaching, there had not been as many tourists and the sale of the statues had greatly declined.

ACTS 19:28 "And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Now let us look and see how Demetrius was able to excite these workers and work them up into an angry mob. We are going to see them stand there for several hours and shout "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" as if this would solve anything.

Let's look at seven points on what Demetrius did.

1. Demetrius, first of all, recognized the effectiveness of Paul's preaching. The loss in their business indicated to him just how effective Paul had been.

2. Apparently Demetrius had attended Paul's meetings. However, Paul's preaching was built on truth and Demetrius was not able to contradict Paul in any of his conclusions. Demetrius was not able to defeat Paul with truth or words.
3. Therefore Demetrius realized that he had to resort to another method and that method was mob violence. Today we have social problems, but they will never be solved by mob violence.
4. Nothing of value will ever be accomplished by mob violence.
5. Please notice five weapons Demetrius used against the Gospel Paul preached--He used
 - a. Organization--the Silversmith Union
 - b. Emotion, which Demetrius employed in his speech
 - c. Religion, which emphasized sex, legalism and business
 - d. Mob rule
 - e. Noise
6. Wrath is the mental attitude by which mob violence is forged into a weapon he used against Paul.
7. This wrath is expressed in shouting slogans which is always a form of self-hypnosis. (The followers of Hitler used this method)

ACTS 19:29 "And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre." The whole city became involved. This happened in the month of May when the Ephesian Mardi Gras was beginning to move toward consummation. They were about to have a thirty-day orgy of sex and religion and immorality. So what Demetrius was saying in substance was this--"Are we going to sit here and let this wet blanket "Paul" destroy all of our fun?"

Please Notice These Principles

1. An organized group, or a union, or some special group is always behind every mob.
Many groups use a mob as their weapon.
2. When the mob is thoroughly aroused, those in the mob always use some system of self-hypnosis or mass hysteria. Once you have mass hysteria, thinking always ceases. Issues can't be debated clearly and adequately discussed in a mob.
3. A mob then becomes destruction and they destroy property and lives. And no matter how good their original intention, their cause always becomes an evil cause. Mob action always confuses the issues involved. People who make up a mob always help destroy government. Mob action not only solves nothing, but it complicates the problem. Nothing has ever been solved by mob activity. Christians should never at any time be a part of a mob. When you take part in a mob, you are acting contrary to the clear teaching of the Word of God.

In the confusion of this mob the people in Ephesus caught Gaius and Aristarchus. Evidently Paul was protected by Aquila and Priscilla. We learn from Romans 16:3-4 that Paul was protected in some way.

A little later on we are to see how a pagan man, not a Christian, a man who was mayor of the city is going to save Paul and establish law and order so the church in Ephesus could continue. Therefore let us leave the mob shouting and by the time we see them next week, they will be so hoarse they can't talk and we will see reason and thinking take over in place of the mob.